

Dr Eilish Gregory looks back on her research as the Little Company of Mary Fellow

During my fellowship as the Little Company of Mary (LCM) Research Fellow in the History of Catholicism at the Centre of Catholic Studies (2022–2025), I studied the global history of women religious through the lens of the LCM sisters, a nursing congregation.

The forthcoming monograph resulting from this fellowship focuses on the global history of the LCM sisters from their foundation in 1877 until the death of Mother Mary Agnes Bray – the last of the original cohort of sisters – in 1941, by thematically examining how the sisters in their global missions engaged in healthcare initiatives, and carried out their missionary work in the communities where they established missions.

Little attention has been placed on these sisters in modern historical scholarship. In my period of study, the sisters founded missions in Argentina, Australia, Britain, Ireland, Italy, Malta, New Zealand, South Africa, the USA, and Zimbabwe.

While my research is primarily drawn from material belonging to the LCM's archive – now housed in the Barker Research Library in Palace Green Library, Durham – my research has taken me to thirty archives across Australia, Britain, Ireland, Italy, Malta, New Zealand, and the USA, which has made the research findings for the book rich and illuminating.



Above: Dr Gregory gives a presentation while on a research trip to New Zealand.

My time as a Research Fellow in the CCS has allowed me to widen my historical expertise in the History of Catholicism and research perspectives in this field.

I am especially grateful to the LCM sisters, their staff, and colleagues at Durham who have supported me throughout my time as research fellow. I wish the very best to my colleagues in both the History of Catholicism and the CCS.

Dr Eilish Gregory
Little Company of Mary Research Fellow (2022-2025)

From a bored student in 1250 to engaged students in 2025

When several of my students asked me to step outside the classroom, I felt a twinge of anxiety. What was wrong? Did they have something difficult to tell me?

To my relief, they broke into smiles, and one of them produced a small cardboard box from his bag. The class had been enjoying the Bonaventure module, he explained, and wanted to give me a token of their appreciation. Inside was a mug.

A few months earlier, I had shown the class a couple of images from the Assisi Manuscript, which I am studying as part of my current research project.

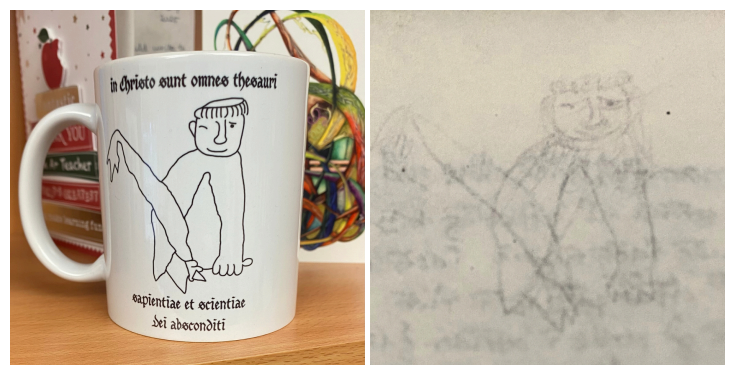
The manuscript, written in Bonaventure's own hand and likely composed during his student years in Paris around 1250, contains, on one of its blank folios, a small faint pencil sketch of a friar holding a quill. Far from looking studious, the friar is smiling mischievously and even appears to be winking.

When I showed this to the class, I jokingly suggested that it might be a self-portrait by Bonaventure, perhaps doodled while listening to a boring lecture.

To my delight, the mug bore a reproduction of that little sketch, accompanied by Bonaventure's famous paraphrase of Colossians 2: 3: "In Christo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi"—"In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge".

It now has pride of place in my office, and serves as a lovely reminder of the students I have the privilege of teaching.

Dr William Crozier
Duns Scotus Assistant Professor in Franciscan Studies



A year in the life of an Early Career Fellow – reflections from Dr Nomi Pritz-Bennett on her first 12 months at the CCS



When asked to reflect on my past year as an early-career theologian, it felt wrong to begin with a list. Instead, I have found myself thinking about Augustine's reflections on time at the end of the *Confessions*.

"See how my life is a distention in several directions," he writes; "You are my eternal Father, but I am scattered in times whose order I do not understand" (XI.39).

Augustine describes time here not so much as a feature of the external world as a distention of the soul – pulled between memory, expectation, and attention to the present. Augustine experiences himself as dispersed across times, unable to find stable footing.

Augustine's fretting about time maps uncannily well onto the inner life of the early-career theologian. He names an experience that feels almost diagnostic of academic precarity.

The fragile present is pulled forward by deadlines and backwards by unfinished projects; forward by concerns over job security, and backwards by concerns over whether one's training was sufficient to the task at hand. This distention is not morally neutral: it signals a self dispersed, unable to rest in unity.

Yet there are moments of ingathering. On the research side, I have continued work on Maurice Blondel, completing an article on his philosophy of mediation and moving steadily toward submission of my manuscript, *True Finitude: Maurice Blondel's Ascetic Philosophy*. Blondel's spiritual and intellectual companionship often has the effect of focusing my attention.

On the teaching side, alongside modules on Christian Ethics and Atonement theology, I have redesigned and taught "Catholic Theology in the Modern World," returning to the period that shaped my own formation.

Teaching this material – two Vatican councils, Newman, Blondel, Congar, de Lubac, Rahner, Balthasar, and others – has reinforced my sense that teaching can gather the self in unique moments of clarity.

Memory and expectation are drawn into attention to the present moment of the classroom. At its best, a kind of shared attentiveness – or even flow – overtakes the discussion. I have been fortunate to work with students who were thoughtful, engaged, and willing to wrestle with (very) demanding primary texts.

Convening the Catholic Theology Research Seminars, supervising students, and contributing to the CCS's developing public presence (follow us on Instagram: [ccs.durham](#)) have all, too, been part of the year's rhythm.

Augustine does not provide me with a productivity hack. He gestures instead toward the re-gathering of the self through a re-ordering of love: "the day when, purified and molten by the fire of your love, I flow together to merge into you."

Read through the lens of early academic life, this does not mean abandoning time's flow or disengaging from professional responsibility. Instead, it means, at least for now, refusing to let the future self become a tyrant, resisting the idea that one's worth lies ahead, and allowing present work – however small – to be meaningful now, and not merely as a stepping stone.

15 April 2026

7.45pm
ER201 Elvet
Riverside
/ online

Public Lecture – part of the Third International Franciscan Studies Conference

Fr Casey Cole, OFM

Digital Evangelist and creator of Breaking in the Habit podcast

'Healing Wounds: A Franciscan Mission in a World Misshaped by Screens'

Booking details to follow

The Bishop Dunn Memorial Lecture 2026



Canon Dr Paula Gooder

Canon Chancellor for St Paul's Cathedral

'Who do you say that I am? Encountering the Jesus of Mark's Gospel'

Booking details to follow

22 Jun 2026

6.45pm
Ushaw Historic House

Events: Epiphany Term 2026

Catholic Theology Research Seminars*

Thur 12 Feb 4pm GMT	Joshua Ralston (University of Edinburgh) <i>TBC</i>	Sem Rm C and Online
Thur 12 Mar 4pm GMT	Todd Walatka (Notre Dame) <i>Óscar Romero and the Structure of Catholic Theology: Uniting What We Separate</i>	St Cuthbert's Society and Online
Tue 17 Mar 4pm GMT	Linn Tonstad (Yale Divinity School) <i>TBC</i>	Sem Rm B and Online

Conferences

Tue 14 - Thur 16 Apr 9.30am BST (GMT+1)	Third International Franciscan Conference <i>Life and Love Transfigured: Exploring New Horizons in the Franciscan Tradition</i> Please contact ccs.admin@durham.ac.uk for details.	Durham
Tue 2 Jun 9.30am - 6.30pm	Early Career and Postgraduate Conference 2026 - details to follow The ECC is a chance for postgraduate students and other early career researchers to meet and to present their research in a collegial environment.	Waterside Building Business School, Durham
Mon 29 Jun - Wed 1 Jul 9.30am BST (GMT+1)	EMBIC V - bookings to open soon The fifth Early Modern British and Irish Catholicism conference, jointly organized by Durham University and the University of Notre Dame.	University of Notre Dame (USA) in England, London

International Scholars in the History of Women Religious Association

Tue 13 Jan 10am GMT	Ji Li (The University of Hong Kong) <i>Christian Virginity and Confucian Chastity: Christian Virgins in Chinese History</i>	Online
Thur 3 Feb 3pm GMT	Luca Al Sabbagh (Independent researcher) <i>Whispers in the Eighteenth-Century Italian Confessional: Women Religious, Priests and Coercion in the Shadow of Sollicitatio ad Turpia</i>	Online
Tue 31 Mar 1pm BST (GMT+1)	Alessia Lirosi (Unicusano) <i>'We keep hidden many other scandals that exist here'. Religious communities for "fallen women" in Papal Rome (centuries 17th-19th)</i>	Online

* Registration for CTRS Seminars, Book Launches, and ISHWRA seminars opens three weeks in advance at <https://centreforcatholicstudies.eventbrite.com>

To receive details of our events and other news to your inbox, please register for the CCS mailing list at <https://www.durham.ac.uk/ccs-email-list>

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Watch videos from staff and students talking about the programme's scope, modules and flexibility, and find full details at <https://www.durham.ac.uk/ccs-distance-learning>.

Any questions? Please contact Theresa Phillips, the CCS Manager: theresa.phillips@durham.ac.uk.

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